

Becoming part of the team: Female student athletes' engagement in initiation activities.

Running Header: Initiation ceremonies female student athletes

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Abstract

The aim of the present research was to explore female student athletes' participation in initiation activities specifically to examining whether activities in the United Kingdom followed similar trends to those reported elsewhere. A sample of eight female athletes, representing both traditional and non-traditional team and individual sports (M age = 20 years 3 months, SD = 1 year 3 months) who met inclusion criteria of having taken part in an initiation ceremony consented to participate in a semi structured interview. Thematic content analysis resulted in the emergence of six higher order themes represented by two general dimensions, the initiation event and initiation outcomes. Findings indicated that female student athletes' initiation activities encompassed discrete stages as they moved from team newcomer to accepted team member. Of particular concern is the direct and indirect role of alcohol within these events and the health and behavioural risks.

KEY WORDS:

University sport, female athletes, initiation ceremonies.

Introduction

Making the transition from school to College or University can present many challenges for student athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Often combined with a move away from the security of their home environment this transition can see these young athletes having to take more responsibility and personal control of their athletic, academic, and social lives (Lowe & Cook, 2003). As well as the obvious adjustments to new surroundings, courses and social circles these athletes have to adjust to the new sporting culture and becoming a member of a new squad and in some cases sport (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

Transitioning into a new team means the athlete has to adjust to different playing and training regimes and a different social standing within that teams hierarchy (Crow & MacIntosh, 2009). Traditionally, this sees them moving from the position of a leader or senior member of their old team to a 'rookie or newbie' in their varsity side. This change of status and entry to the new squad is often accompanied by the athlete having to participate in a series of initiation activities, often described as a 'rite de passage' (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005). Through successful negotiation of these initiation challenges the athlete is deemed to have shown allegiance and dedication to the group and moves from an outsider to in-group member (Keating et al., 2005; Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011). However, the tasks and activities engaged in, regularly defended by the notion that they are designed to welcome new members and develop cohesion, are often embarrassing, humiliating, degrading, painful and can present significant health risks and in extreme cases become life threatening (Nuwer, 2004). In essence initiates are subjected to hazing. Whilst there is still much debate over what constitutes hazing, the present study will adopt the definition proposed by Crow and Macintosh (2008), who defined hazing as:

Any potentially humiliating, degrading, abusive, or dangerous activity expected of a junior-ranking athlete by a more senior team-mate, which does

not contribute to either athlete's positive development, but is required to be accepted as part of a team, regardless of the junior-ranking athlete's willingness to participate. This includes, but is not limited to, any activity, no matter how traditional or seemingly benign, that sets apart or alienates any team-mate based on class, number of years on the team, or athletic ability (Crow & Macintosh, 2009, p.449).

However, student athletes' understanding as to what constitutes acts of hazing, and whether group activities are indeed negative initiations, is limited. Allen and Madden (2008) in a study with American student-athletes found there to be confusion and a lack of knowledge over what constituted hazing, and whilst many athletes had been hazed they did not identify the event(s) as such. There are several plausible reasons for this disconnect. Firstly, as highlighted in numerous research studies (e.g. Crow & McIntosh, 2009; Johnson & Chin, 2016; Waldron, 2015) hazing in sport is seen as a tradition and the degrading, humiliating and dangerous tasks are rationalised as being club based traditions which are there to enhance team cohesion. Research in both the United States and United Kingdom has failed to support this assertion. Van Raalte, Cornelius, Linder, and Brewer (2007) found that hazing was associated with reduced team cohesion in a USA student athlete sample and Lafferty, Wakefield, and Fountain (2016) found there to be no significant relationship between cohesion and hazing in a UK student-athlete cohort. Furthermore Johnson (2011) suggested that rather than foster community spirit, equality and togetherness thereby developing what Turner (1969) referred to as *communitas*, hazing initiations could in fact create a fractured group. A two tier system and hierarchy whereby mistrust, fear and resentment divide the new and old team members.

Interestingly, a second reason may stem from the notion of consent. Allen and Madden (2008) found that student athletes believed that if the initiate consented to participate then the activities were not hazing. This perception negates the power differential and social hierarchy whereby it could be argued that consent is not given freely, and arises from peer

coercion, a need to conform to expectations and show no weakness. In this situation the neophyte group members have been coerced into engagement (Brackenridge, 1997), either through a combination of direct and indirect external pressures and or, internal motives. Research conducted by Waldron and colleagues in the USA has highlighted both the desire to be accepted (Waldron & Kowalski, 2009) and the need to avoid feelings of exclusion (Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011) as strong internal motives for participation. Given that in the USA varsity sport has a much more structured program in terms of coaching and team selection, it could be argued that these feelings of needing to be accepted into the group are stronger in United Kingdom student athletes where quite often the team captain also selects the team to play.

Importantly the role of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) may also contribute to the lack of understanding or acknowledgment regarding initiation events. Athletes who have been subjected to initiations may downplay the negative event and rationalise and justify their involvement as being merely a team tradition and a means of showing commitment to the new team and a chance to learn the team and group rules (Hinkle, 2006). These rules often serve as unwritten codes of conduct that group members must adhere to with non-adherence or rule violation leading to punishment (Nuwer, 1999). Within sport rules can pertain to: the hierarchy and structure of the group, codes of silence, words of team anthems and songs, and the rules of any particular team challenges or activities (Kirby & Wintrup, 2002; Crow & Macintosh, 2009). Knowledge and understanding of these unwritten rules serve to further the initiate's immersion into, and strengthen their allegiance to, the group. This in turn, creates for them a new personal identity no longer the 'fresher' but a team member (Johnson, 2011). Through gaining the status of in-group member negative emotions and thoughts regarding the unpleasantness, embarrassment and risk of any initiation activity are restructured, reduced

and reframed. In effect, this then strengthens the notion that the rite of passage is worth the risk thereby sustaining the presence of initiation activities (Johnson, 2002).

Critically, when student-athletes are asked about hazing reference is made to engagement in physical tasks. There is little acknowledgement or, knowledge that activities falling under the umbrella of norm violation and social deviance also constitute acts of hazing. Keating et al. (2005) listed activities such as; revealing embarrassing personal information, binge drinking, completing onerous tasks and sexual conquests as examples of non-physical initiation activities that could be classified as hazing. Of real concern to all those working to combat hazing and initiation activities is the role of alcohol and the associated direct and indirect health risks and tragic consequences when things go wrong (Nuwer, 1999). Binge drinking, excessive consumption in so called race-games, and the mixing of drinks have been previously documented as core components of initiation activities (Nuwer, 1999; Waldron, 2008).

Allen and Madden (2008) in the American National Study of Student Hazing reported that 23% of those surveyed drank to the point of being sick or passing out. Whilst no direct comparative data are available for the United Kingdom a study by Southampton Student Union into initiation activities found of those surveyed all stated that their initiation involved alcohol. This combined with the results of a study by Longstaff et al. (2015) who found that UK student athletes “consistently reported that they drank significantly more frequently, drank in greater quantities, and were more often drunk than students who were not engaged in university sport” (p. 69), suggests that alcohol may be an important and significant component of British student athletes’ initiation practices. In turn, excessive consumption can increase the health risks associated with initiation activities directly and indirectly (Groves, Griggs, & Leflay, 2012). Alcohol reduces inhibitions, creates feelings of invincibility and can lead to risk taking and or anti-social behaviour. Consequently, the likelihood of participating

in extreme or dangerous acts increases and in conjunction with the often secret location of the initiation means the risk to participants' health and wellbeing also increases (Finkel, 2002).

Despite heightened awareness of the dangers, and the work of the British Universities and Colleges Sport organisation (BUCS #Takeastand charter), initiation events in the UK remain embedded in sporting societies, supported, maintained and protected through the code of silence that surrounds such activities (Groves, Griggs, & Leflay, 2012). Worryingly, along with the culture of silence and secrecy, is the fact that athletes continue to participate in such events with very few questioning their engagement and involvement. Even with increased awareness of the dangers, there appears to be an unwillingness from sporting groups to change their behaviour or challenge the traditions even though research has shown the benefits of alternative team building approaches (Johnson & Chin, 2016) and provided guidelines on how to facilitate anti-hazing workshops (Waldron, 2012).

Why hazing continues and why new athletes continue to participate remains a critical question. Waldron and Krane (2005) proposed a conceptual framework to explain why athletes, who may be described as seemingly health conscious, would engage in health compromising behaviours, including hazing. They argued that participation in hazing is the result of deviant overconformity to two components of the sport ethic, namely striving for distinction and making sacrifices (Waldron & Kowalski, 2009).

The sport ethic has been described by Hughes and Coakley (1991) as “what many participants in sport have come to use as the criteria for defining what it means to be a real athlete” (p. 308) and encapsulates; striving for distinction, making sacrifices, accepting risks, and refusing to accept limits in the pursuit of athletic greatness and winning. Adherence to the sport ethic, through a no matter what mentality, can seemingly bring rewards for the athlete. They may be seen as a star performer or, have elevated status compared to others.

Conformity and subsequent overconformity from following the sport ethic can increase social approval and standing amongst peers, and give athletes' heightened status and recognition. If an athlete's motives are ego orientated, and or they are in a dominant ego involving climate (Nicholls, 1989) they can enter a situation of deviant overconformity in order to maintain or increase the level of social approval and recognition.

Waldron and Krane (2005) argued that hazing activities provide the initiate with the opportunity to gain social approval, distinction and recognition as a team member through participation. Successful completion of even the most degrading tasks gives an indication of their commitment to the team and their willingness to give all for team membership. Gaining both distinction and recognition as a team member increases the sense of belonging and bond with, and to, the group leading to heightened conformity to the group norms. Thus, if adherence to the sport ethic and overconformity can explain the initiate's involvement, it could be argued that this immersion into the sporting group leads over time to groupthink and this may in part explain why initiations continue. Recently Hamilton et al. (2016) proposed a further explanation by examining whether Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986) could be used to predict hazing perpetration in a Canadian University sample. Results showed that personal experience of hazing, being subjected to one or more hazing activities, was the most significant predictor of whether the initiate became an initiator and hazing leader. Hamilton suggested in line with SCT that observing the hazing behaviours of older team members, and the subsequent social reward and power whilst being initiated presented an observational learning experience and that in turn contributed to the desire to be in a position to become the perpetrator. Combining all of the above ideas suggests that there are numerous factors that contribute to the continuation of the initiation and hazing cycle.

To-date, few studies have explored the hazing and initiation activities of United Kingdom student-athletes. The Timmouth report was an unpublished representation of

problem activities and behaviours whilst Clayton (2012) presented an initiation tale drawn from ethnographic fieldwork with male football and rugby players. Anderson, McCormack, and Lee (2012) also employed an ethnographic approach in a larger multiple method study examining male team sport hazing initiations over several years. As Groves, Griggs, and Leafley (2012) state to-date no one has focused specifically upon female athletes' experiences. Johnson and Holman (2009) in a study of Canadian female sport-players found that they now engage in more initiation activities and these carry the hallmark characteristics of hazing both in terms of activities, challenges and structure (Johnson, 2000; 2002). Furthermore, it has been suggested that in some cases female sport initiations are now similar to those of male sport teams in terms of the level of physical violence, psychological abuse and alcohol consumption (Hamilton, Scott, La Chapelle, & O'Sullivan, 2013; Waldron & Kane, 2005). Whilst these similarities exist differences have also been highlighted. For example, female initiations have been found to focus less on nudity, with more tolerance shown toward those who do not wish to participate and less power and coercion is used (Johnson, 2002; Groves et al., 2012).

Women's sport initiations therefore appear to be both similar and different, in essence conducted for the same reasons but implemented with a reduced power dominance. Critically however, these assertions are based on research from the United States and Canada, therefore the primary aim of the present research was to build on the findings of these studies and examine whether similar traits were present within a specific United Kingdom (UK) sample and in doing so increase our understanding and knowledge of the context and culture surrounding female initiation activities. Thereby our study will provide insight into the sport initiation world for the practitioner who may be challenged with developing more appropriate team building activities or, dealing with the outcomes of such events.

Method

Participants

Eight female student athletes (M age = 20 years 3 months, SD = 1 year 3 months) from higher education institutions in England consented to participate. These athletes represented a range of University competitive sporting societies (dance, cheerleading, field hockey and netball) and all fulfilled the inclusion criteria that they were, or had been, part of a sporting society and had taken part in a welcome event that could be described as an initiation activity.

Procedure

Following University Ethical approval team captains of female sporting societies were contacted, the study explained and permission obtained for one of the research team to attend training and briefly introduce the study to society members. At the briefing the researcher gave an overview of the project and explained that the study was exploring the concept and impact of introduction and welcome activities on new members. A basic definition of what was meant by welcome activities was shared and reiterated on the information sheet. Each player was then given an information sheet that included the email contact details of the research team and how to participate in the study; they were also asked to share the request with others they may know who might be willing to take part. Recruiting participants post briefing through email meant that other team members were unaware of who, within their squad, had agreed to participate and individuals' anonymity was protected at all times. Participants who contacted the research team were sent an information pack that contained a detailed information sheet, informed consent form, and potential dates, times, and suggested locations for the interview. Of the ten players that emailed eight consented to participate.

Interviews were conducted either in the sport psychology research laboratories or at a convenient location identified by the participant and all were recorded using an audio Dictaphone. Prior to commencing the interview participants gave consent verbally and in writing through completion of the informed consent forms. Interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

Script development and interview technique

To facilitate the interview a seven section interview guide was developed; this a priori structure ensured that all key areas of interest were explored. Section 1 and 2 encompassed the study introduction and rapport building with sections 4, 5 and 6 examining participants' knowledge of, participation in and perceived benefits of initiation activities (appendix 1). However, a conversational approach was adopted, this meant that sections 4, 5, and 6 were not necessarily discussed sequentially (Patton, 2002). This reduced the potential for the interviewer to inadvertently influence or impact upon participant responses and increased the flexibility to explore new or meaningful experiences (Patton, 2002).

Verbatim transcription and data cleaning (Kaiser, 2009) took place immediately after each interview had concluded. Names of the participant and any team mates were replaced with pseudonyms, other non-essential information (e.g. location of the University) that could identify either participants and or team mates were removed or altered to reduce identification through deductive disclosure (Tolich, 2004).

Data analysis

Transcripts were analysed through a two-phase procedure comprised of data organisation and data interpretation (Coté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993), using stages similar to those outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The first phase of analysis termed ‘data organisation’ incorporated data familiarisation and data coding. To facilitate data familiarisation each transcript was read and re-read and initial impressions and ideas noted. This individual reading phase lead to the compilation of a list of ideas that emerged across the interviews. This provided the basis for the second stage of phase one where an open coding strategy was adopted by the lead researcher to create meaning units from the texts. In the present analysis a meaning unit was defined as “a segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode or piece of information” (Tesch, 1990, p. 116). These raw meaning units were then further reduced to meaningful units using in vivo coding to retain the relevant portions of text / ideas (Saldaña, 2009).

The second phase of analysis ‘data interpretation’ began with the grouping together of similar meaningful units and subsequent labelling to create a series of lower order themes. This was followed by a cyclical, iterative process where lower order themes were examined and commonalities and interactions identified leading to the emergence of second order and subsequently higher order themes. The cyclical nature of this stage meant that the meaningful units within the lower order themes, and the lower order themes within the higher order themes were constantly reviewed ensuring internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 2002). Higher order themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to allow general dimensions to emerge.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the data was established through multiple methods of data triangulation. Data credibility was established through participant recruitment; contacting a range of teams meant that participants were drawn from several sports which allowed similarities and variations in individual’s experiences to be captured. This contributed to the

richness of the data and presented differing perspectives on welcome activities (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Secondly, the number of players interviewed fell within the acceptable participant range of 15 participants plus or minus 10, where it is suggested that data saturation is reached (Patton, 2002). Member checks were then conducted with each participant being sent their transcript and a copy of the initial impressions and ideas noted at the data familiarisation stage. Participants were invited to comment on and amend any portions of the text that did not accurately represent their story (Carlson, 2010). Two stages of investigator triangulation were performed. In the first phase the lead author coded the data and the meaning units and lower, higher order themes and dimensions were discussed at length with the second author until agreement was reached.

Mindful of closed interpretation and researcher bias the diagrammatic representations were then shared with several colleagues not involved in the research but who had experience of qualitative analysis. They were asked to act as critical friends and given the brief of challenging the interpretation and exploring alternative interpretations prior to participating in a reflective discussion with the lead researcher (Patton, 2002). A multi-method approach to trustworthiness was adopted to reduce the potential inherent bias and misrepresentation that we, as researchers, can consciously and sub-consciously bring to the analysis. Reflecting and working with experts and other stakeholders allowed us to be reflexive and challenged over our position relative to the data.

Results

The purpose of this study was to build on existent research and examine whether a sample of UK female sport players' engagement in welcome activities and initiation events followed a similar pattern to research from other countries, namely America and Canada. The findings are represented by six higher order themes: (1) the event, (2) group structure, (3)

initiation activities, (4) role of alcohol, (5) perceived positive effects, and (6) negative effects.

Themes one to four were captured under the general dimension of the initiation, whilst themes five and six relate to the initiation outcome dimension (figure 1).

**** Insert figure 1 near here ****

The event

When asked to recall how they felt prior to the initiation/welcome event the players talked about how their pre-event thoughts tended to be negative and that they were scared and worried because they didn't know what they would have to do. For example, participant #7, a hockey player, talked about how she felt "...a bit nervous, cause you don't know what to expect". Participants #4 and #5 also talked about feeling nervous and described how there was an air of secrecy that surrounded the actual event and a lack of information and rumours relating to activities, "... we had heard something about a fish" and "...we weren't told it would be initiations ...we sort of guessed". It could be argued that maintaining secrecy was part of the control element and had the effective of increasing initiates' anxiety.

The second order theme of event attendance included the initiate, bystander, and initiator attendance. New team members felt compelled to attend and pressure from older established players was a recurrent theme as exemplified by participant #1 who stated that "...the more they emphasised the fact of who had to be there, the more we knew..." and "they sort of said it was compulsory and that you had to be there...". The feeling that attendance was compulsory was heightened by a fear of exclusion if they did not attend. Participant #1 talked about how not attending might impact on future socials, describing how "everyone encouraged us to go...like older years...to get to know people better and I knew if I didn't go on the first one I probably wouldn't go on them again", whilst participant #6

talked about not wanting to be excluded “I wanted to be there for initiations, everyone was going and you didn’t want to feel left out I suppose”.

As well as feeling that they were under pressure to attend from senior players, participants also discussed how they felt a certain pressure to attend from their own peer group, with comments such as “... they are going out so obviously you want to as well” (participant #5). Interestingly, although all the players talked about feeling that they had to attend they were also quick to state that attendance was optional and that if people chose not to attend they would not be punished. However, each description of the event being optional was caveated with an explanation that they were positively encouraged to attend. For example, participant #2 stated “ ...it was optional but it was encouraged that everybody went” and participant #6 said “it wasn’t forced upon us but it was kind of made clear that it was initiation, I don’t think that anyone chose not to turn up, but it wasn’t forced upon us”.

When describing where the event took place participants talked about the secrecy of the location which varied from a team member’s house, to a public car park and in one case actually on the University premises. All of the participants also talked about the dress code and how they were dressed differently and therefore visible and identifiable as initiates. For example participant #6, a hockey player, had to dress up in a Halloween costume, and participants #1 and #2, netball players, had to wear white t-shirts. Whilst participants from cheer leading had their normal clothes replaced as described by participant #4;

“...we came in normal clothes and then when we got there we only had to wear a bin bag when we went out... they took our clothes put them in another bin bag and we had to carry them around”.

Group structure

The second higher order theme, within the general dimension of the initiation, focused on the group structure and in particular elements of power and hierarchy. Recounting the

events of their welcome/initiation all of the participants made reference to their position within the squad and being identified as freshers. Participant #6 stated that “we definitely knew we were at the bottom of the rank...” whilst participant #4 talked about the fresher’s “...being a bit of an underdog”.

Athletes in the sample also made reference to the concept of power and control. Participant #6 described the society hierarchy, stating that they (the freshers) were “probably at the bottom coz the social secs are at the top and the rest of the team would probably be in the middle” and participant #1 discussed how “the social secs were kind of in control that night”. The notion and concept of control was also evident as participants went on to describe how they had to obey and follow orders, were punished for infringements, and how there was a certain amount of pressure and coercion to complete tasks. These ideas are summarised in the following quote from participant #6;

“...probably yeah, like to let everyone know they are the fresher’s and the social secs are in charge on the night out and you like have to learn the rules...like if you do incest (*enter into a relationship with a male player from the same sport*) and things like that then you get fined for it.....”

Interestingly, whilst all the participants talked about the power that the social secretary had on the night they also described how other players adopted more of a bystander role with participant #6 stating that “second years just tended to watch I suppose”. In contrast, participant #7 described how during her initiation the second years acted as allies even though the hierarchy was still in evidence:

“...definitely say like the fresher’s were at the bottom and the older ones that had been an... done it before were sort of at the top and the social secs as well have sort of totally got control and like the second years are the ones that you can go to and confide in and they’ll help you tip drinks away like if your struggling and things like that but yeah we were definitely at the bottom”.

Initiation activities

The initiation activities described by the participants included food related challenges, general tasks and trials, and alcoholic challenges. Within the food related challenges participants described how they had to play games such as apple bobbing, whilst other activities included “...getting messy... you had to get a mint out of some flour and you ended up with it everywhere” (participant #6). Both of these could be considered innocent and normal party games; however, both were linked to further challenges and punishments and were deemed compulsory. Participant #4 described how their food related challenges included having “...to eat baby food, then some stuff on the street... and then we had to down mints and vinegar”.

As well as food related challenges, new team members were also subjected to challenges designed to degrade, embarrass, and humiliate them with non-completion leading to punishment or fines. As participant #2 recalled “...we had to stand on stage...the freshers had to stand on stage, and we had to act out sex positions with each other...if we didn’t do it we had to drink what we had in our hand..”.

Whilst most participants reported engagement in some sort of physical task, participants #4 and #5 described how their initiation involved a live goldfish which they had to look after throughout the night.

“.....we found out on the night that we had to carry fishes around, you had to protect the fish and if the fish died then you were not allowed on the squad....having a fish in a club it felt dead mean....”

A common theme across all participants’ initiation was the inclusion of alcoholic tasks such as shots, funnels, and dirty pints. One participant described how they had to down a ‘dirty’ pint of lager and custard whilst others talked about drinking dirty shots as part of their initiation activities.

Role of alcohol

Whilst alcohol was used as an initiation task it also played a more generic role in the event as evidenced by the constant references to the amount consumed and its use as a punishment. All the participants talked about the amount they drank through the night and how even though reporting that “we felt quite tipsy we then we went on to drink a bit more” (participant #6) and “probably being that drunk that I couldn’t remember most of the night” (participant #7) formed commonly occurring statements.

Participants also talked about how through alcohol they lost their inhibitions and as described by participant #1 it “... sort of like relaxed you, so I think people like were more sort of outgoing”. This sentiment was echoed by participant #3 who described the use of alcohol as an icebreaker and a means to get people to engage with the group.

“..They were just trying to get us a bit drunk so that we were a bit more confident and a bit more chatty, if someone was a bit shy and if they have had a few drinks then they might feel a bit more willing to get to know each other...” (Participant #3).

Whilst all participants described the role that alcohol played they were also quick to state how they were not coerced or forced into drinking and that if people didn’t want to drink they didn’t have to. As participant #6 explained “there was the option not to drink alcohol though if someone didn’t get involved then it would just seem a bit boring...”, whilst participant #8 described how “there was like some people who didn’t actually want to drink alcohol they could still join in though..”.

A strong link emerged between alcohol and enjoyment and the perception that if people chose not to drink then they would not enjoy the event or participate. These ideas are summarised by participant #3 who said;

“...yeah, there were a couple of girls that weren’t that interested in drinking and when.. ... and so maybe they didn’t loosen up as much as the rest of us did so they might of felt a bit more conscious...”

Perceived positive effects

Perceived positive effects was the first higher order theme within the general dimension of initiation outcomes and encapsulated two second order themes of becoming a team member and the positive atmosphere. Becoming a team member included lower order themes such as acceptance into the group, shared experiences, and rule learning. All participants talked about how they got to know people through the event and the initiation provided a means for “getting to know people in a social atmosphere” (participant #8). Importantly for the participants, their involvement also increased their feelings of being accepted by the other years as described by the statements, “you felt more involved with the older ones” (participant #7) and “the second and third years started chatting to you more” (participant #6). The idea that participating in the initiation activities allowed the initiates to prove themselves to others was highlighted through descriptions such as “I think it can show like, how much you can take things on the chin and how thick skinned you are..” (Participant #4).

All the participants also talked about how throughout the event there was a positive atmosphere and people appeared happy and upbeat. They also discussed at length the concept that the activities and event is all done for fun and that everyone “... was in sort of good spirits” (participant #6). The perceived positive effects can be summarised in the following quote from participant #7;

“...I think it’s a good ice breaker for the team and makes the team gel a bit more, I think that in a weird way it can help with team bonding and help match performance I suppose cause everyone knows each other a bit more and are more comfortable in telling each other stuff, like telling them where to go on the pitch...”

Negative effects

Whilst all participants talked about positive outcomes from the initiation event they also made reference to less positive aspects that could be classified as negative effects. This created at times a contradictory view of their thoughts and feelings about the initiations. This higher order theme encompassed second order themes of negative consequences and anti-social behaviour. Negative consequences included feelings of embarrassment during the activities and feelings of relief when the initiation was over. In some cases participants described how involvement in the initiation had a lasting impact on some team members. Participant #5 reported that "...some people don't get involved as much anymore, but they did on the night... some of them get embarrassed, they don't like it because they hate being embarrassed." Others reported how during the evening they were further embarrassed and humiliated as they were made to carry their sick around with them (participant #4), whilst participant #5 described how she "...got my clothes' stolen and I had to walk home half nakedwalking home alone in my bra, it was the worst part".

This dimension also included the lower order theme of antisocial behaviour. Many of the participants identified with the fact that their initiation should not have been conducted in a public place and may have had consequences for residents living in the area. As participant #5 stated;

"it's not very appropriate to be like sick all over a car park.... we made a bit of a mess of the car park....but you know no one was like breaking the law or anything...although maybe the noise for the people living around there it wasn't great ..".

The impact of initiations on the surrounding community and the involvement of the police was also commented on by participant #4 who summarised their initiation experience by saying "we had to do a relay race, eat some stuff on the street and then the police got called."

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to build on existent research and examine whether a sample of UK female sport players' engagement in welcome activities and initiation events followed a similar pattern to those reported elsewhere, namely America and Canada. In addition to this, it was intended that the qualitative approach would also identify any health risk behaviours that female student athletes' engaged in when trying to become members of, and accepted into a University team and whether these behaviours could be aligned with the overconformity to both the striving for distinction and sacrifices components of the sport ethic model as identified by Waldron and Krane (2005).

The emerging themes and dimensions described in the results resonate with research from the United States (e.g. Waldron & Kowalski, 2009) and Canada (Hamilton et al., 2013). Initiation activities of this UK sample seem to follow the pattern of humiliation, over consumption of alcohol, and engagement in activities that would normally be deemed socially unacceptable, immoral or disrespectful at any other time.

Fear over what they would have to do, a lack of knowledge and the secrecy surrounding the event dominated the pre-initiation thoughts of all those interviewed. These are all commonly reported elements in hazing and can be aligned to the pre-initiation anxiety stage of the three phase initiation model described by Johnson (2000) and based on the work of Van Gennep (1960). During this time the secrecy combined with peer pressure to attend not only served to heighten the anxiety but also to maintain the in-group out-group division, increasing the divide between the new players and established squad members.

The second stage, in the third phase model the actual initiation / hazing event, is overseen by the senior members of the squad. It is characterised by task completion and developing knowledge of the group's culture and traditions (Kirby & Wintrup, 2000). During

this stage the new members also develop a bond with each other through the activities and shared experiences (Johnson, 2000). Elements of all these processes emerged from the interviews in the present study, again lending support to the idea that initiation activities in the United Kingdom are similar to America and Canada and suggesting that core elements of hazing are not specific to one location. Elements of ritualistic humiliation, for example acting out sex positions on stage with each other, and degradation including nudity, stripping and having to wear bin bags combined with the drinking of dirty shots and pints indicated that the initiation activities used on the sample in the present study incorporate psychological, physical and alcohol related hazing as described by Diamond, Callahan, Chain, and Solomon (2016). Furthermore, these findings replicate those of Johnson (2002) with respect to the emergent themes of clothing, nudity, and sexual acts. This suggests that female initiations as a tradition and the encompassing elements have not changed over time.

The results in the present study align to the three phase initiation model described by Johnson (2000). However, it can also be argued that there are indications that the initiates engaged in these activities through a desire to prove themselves as worthy group members. One of the perceived positive effects was that through event attendance and participation they became group members despite the trials that they went through. Initiates also talked about how they learnt the rules of the group and the group structure. Gaining group status in this manner meant they became identifiable to those within the wider University community as members of their specific team, subsequently increasing their social standing and status.

It could be argued that these findings indicate that the athletes in the present study engaged in deviant conformity in order to strive for distinction through group membership, and through task commitment exhibited absolute commitment to the group. Both factors previously identified by Waldron and Kane (2005) as to why new members participate in hazing and initiation rituals.

Interestingly, although Waldron and Kane based their theory on the first two components of the sport ethic model, results of the present study indicate that initiates may also overconform to the final two elements, namely accepting risks and refusing to accept limits (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). Accepting the challenges, completing them, not giving in and continuing to participate through excessive alcohol consumption, acknowledged by comments relating to consuming more than normal are indications that there are both elements of accepting the risk and a willingness to go beyond their personal limits. We accept that the small sample size in the present study means at present these are tentative suggestions. However, as the lack of a full theoretical model of hazing is one criticism of work in this area then future work should explore the effect of over conformity to all elements of the sport ethic.

The involvement and use of alcohol was a central tenet in the initiation stories told; alcohol was an essential component of many tasks and integral to the evening. Those interviewed talked of drinking a lot more than usual, to a point where they could not really remember the events, and how their confidence increased with consumption. Increased alcohol consumption and binge drinking has become common among female athletes and it could be argued that the initiation event may serve as the starting point for this behaviour (Gutgesell, Moreau, & Thompson, 2003; Lisha & Sussman, 2010). Cadigan, Littlefield, Martens and Sher (2013) conducted a longitudinal study in the USA into transitions into and out of college sport and risky drinking. Findings revealed that those who remained involved with sport throughout their University career demonstrated increased problem drinking patterns including heavy drinking. Interestingly, the freshman who went on to become ‘starters’ engaged in a pattern of drinking similar to those older players even in the first year. If this is the case and the results of the present study are representative of initiations in the United Kingdom as a whole, the role of alcohol at initiation events could be considered two-

fold. Alcohol plays a central role in terms of its use within the initiations as a challenge, punishment or threat. However, the level of drinking in general may also be indicative of University sporting culture in general where it is known that athletes have a tendency to consume more alcohol than non-sport members. Aside from the short and long term health and medical risks, increased consumption can lead to societal and safety problems and can increase the likelihood of risk behaviours through alcohol induced confidence and inhibition reduction (Hollmann, 2002; Atwell, Abraham, & Duka, 2011). It is therefore important that future studies in the United Kingdom explore in more detail the role of alcohol in university sporting societies and teams.

Emerging from the interviews was a strong emphasis on group hierarchy and structure, with those interviewed talking about how they were at the bottom of the team social structure as new players. The real and perceived power imbalance is a central component of hazing. It contributes to the culture of fear prior to the event and the dominance and control felt during the actual hazing phase (Johnson, 2011). Interestingly however, those interviewed reported how at times the second year students, group members who had been initiated the year before, did not act as mere bystanders but helped them, for example discreetly getting rid of drinks. This is in contrast to the findings of research into male sport teams and suggests a certain amount of sympathy and empathy from those who are yet to be in a position of power or social dominance (Johnson, 2002).

When questioned as to the role of the initiations positive and negative effects were reported. But emphasis was placed on it being done in an upbeat manner and by going through the evening they felt part of the team. However, acknowledgement was made that some people didn't play sport or socialise with the team after the event. This finding aligns to the final or membership phase outlined by Johnson (2011) in that those who were successful were welcomed into the group and felt part of something and a sense of belonging whilst,

those who had a more negative experience failed to gain that status. Failure to gain status could see young athletes drop out of sport, or leave higher education and this combined with the obvious health risks indicates that work is still needed to educate sport teams about positive team building and reduce the onus and emphasis on the tradition cycles and power hierarchy created by initiation events.

To-date, this is the first study in the United Kingdom to look specifically at female student athletes and serves to provide us with an insight into the activities conducted in the name of team bonding that are in fact initiation activities. Our results support the work of colleagues in other countries (e.g. Hamilton et al., 2013; Johnson, 2002; Waldron & Kowalski, 2009) and suggest that initiation activities and health risk behaviours are similar despite geographical differences. That said, the present study is not without its weaknesses. Whilst data saturation was met, and participant numbers were within the recognised range of Patton (2002) we recognise that generalisation is difficult and our findings relate to the experiences of a small number of athletes. It would be beneficial to interview more athletes from more universities around the United Kingdom in order to verify our findings and examine any differences between different types of higher education institutions.

Further we are aware that at present the views represent those who participated in the initiation events and remained within the squad. We did not explore whether they knew players who dropped out because of these activities, nor did we interview any ex-players who ceased playing due to these events. Following these lines of enquiry will help to further develop our knowledge and understanding of female sport players' initiation activities, the effects on all participants and the outcomes in terms of those who remain and those who may leave the sport.

Critically however, research into hazing and initiation activities is both sensitive and difficult. We need to overcome the dome of silence within which these activities take place and build a level of trust with sport team members and athletes so that stories can emerge in a supported environment (Kirby & Wintrup, 2002). It is only through doing this that sport psychologists and practitioners will be able to develop successful interventions that are both culturally and context specific (Ryba, Stambulova, Si, & Schinke, 2013).

Whilst evidence does exist as to the benefits of alternative team building approaches, to-date these have been based in the United States and Canada and involved participation in outdoor activities. Johnson and Chin (2016) found that athletes reported positive effects of an experiential weekend orientation that included elements of adventure-challenges, team building tasks and cooperation events. The findings suggest that a cooperative, challenging atmosphere reduced and lead to a redefining of the group hierarchical structure and subsequent change in peer relationships. Whilst it may not be possible to replicate an adventure orientation weekend off campus within the UK, and given the findings of the present study echo previous research, a starting point for an intervention could be to adopt elements of Johnson and Chin's work. For example sport psychologists could work with coaches, student unions, and athletic unions to develop resources for student athletes. This could include information on alternative team building activities and strategies to reduce the feelings of peer pressure and group hierarchy. Importantly, they could also work to increase awareness and understanding of the health and social risks involved in continuing with the outdated tradition of initiations and hazing events. It is only through challenging the culture and context will we be able to replace negative initiations with positive team building activities.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the limitations of this small scale study it has provided the first insight into the initiation activities of female University sport players in the UK higher education context. Elements most often reported in male initiation and hazing rituals were evident in the accounts of those interviewed. The notion of power and hierarchy, dominant within the male sporting culture were obvious within the stories told and the role of alcohol both as part of challenges and generally as part of the event gives rise to concerns over student athlete health risk behaviours. Nakedness, dressing in different clothing and engagement in anti-social and demeaning acts provided evidence as to how female sporting societies were mirroring their male counterparts although differences emerged in terms of the environment being less brutal with elements of social support between the years shown. These results replicate the findings of previous research by Johnson (2002) and Waldron et al. (2011). Whilst initiation activities have been banned by student unions and the National Union of Students has a no tolerance policy it is obvious from this research that they still occur and for sport psychologists to deliver effective interventions a greater understanding of culture, context and environment is needed.

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Appendix 1 – Interview Guide Structure

Interview section	Aim	Exemplar questions
I. Introduction	To explain the focus of the research and identify key demographic information.	What is your primary sport? Which sporting societies do you belong to? What subject(s) are you studying?
II. Rapport building	To develop a level of trust and rapport between the researcher and the interviewee.	How would you describe yourself? What do you enjoy the most about your sport? What has been your best playing moment?
III. Explore knowledge of welcome activities and initiations	To identify what is known about welcome / initiation activities in University sport.	Before you came to University had you heard about welcome activities? Prompts: What did you know about them? How did you hear about them?
IV. Personal involvement as an initiate	To identify the activities engaged in, the thoughts and feelings about this and the social structure during the event.	Can you tell me what happened at your welcome event? Prompts: Where was it? How did you hear about it? What were your feelings? Who coordinated these activities? Prompts: So can you explain the social structure at the event? Exploration of power and control So can you explain the social structure at the event? Exploration of power and control? How did you feel (time line approach)? Prompts: Thoughts and affective response
V. Perceived benefits	To develop an understanding of the perceived benefits of involvement.	How do you think holding these events impacts on the group? Do you feel they are beneficial?
VI. Additional comments	To raise and discuss any other points, or personal experiences that have not been shared.	Would you like to add anything that we have not yet discussed that you feel may add to my understanding of your experience?
VII. Close out	To finish the interview leaving participant in positive frame of mind	Link back to questions in section II

Table 1 – Participant characteristics.

Participant code	Sport	Sporting history	Age	University degree year
Participant #1	Netball	University, club & school teams	19	First
Participant #2	Netball	University & school teams	20	First
Participant #3	Netball	University, county, & school teams	20	Second
Participant #4	Cheerleading	University	19	First
Participant #5	Cheerleading	University	19	First
Participant #6	Hockey	University, club & school teams	22	Masters
Participant #7	Hockey	University, county, club, & school teams	21	Masters
Participant #8	Hockey	University, club & school teams	22	Third

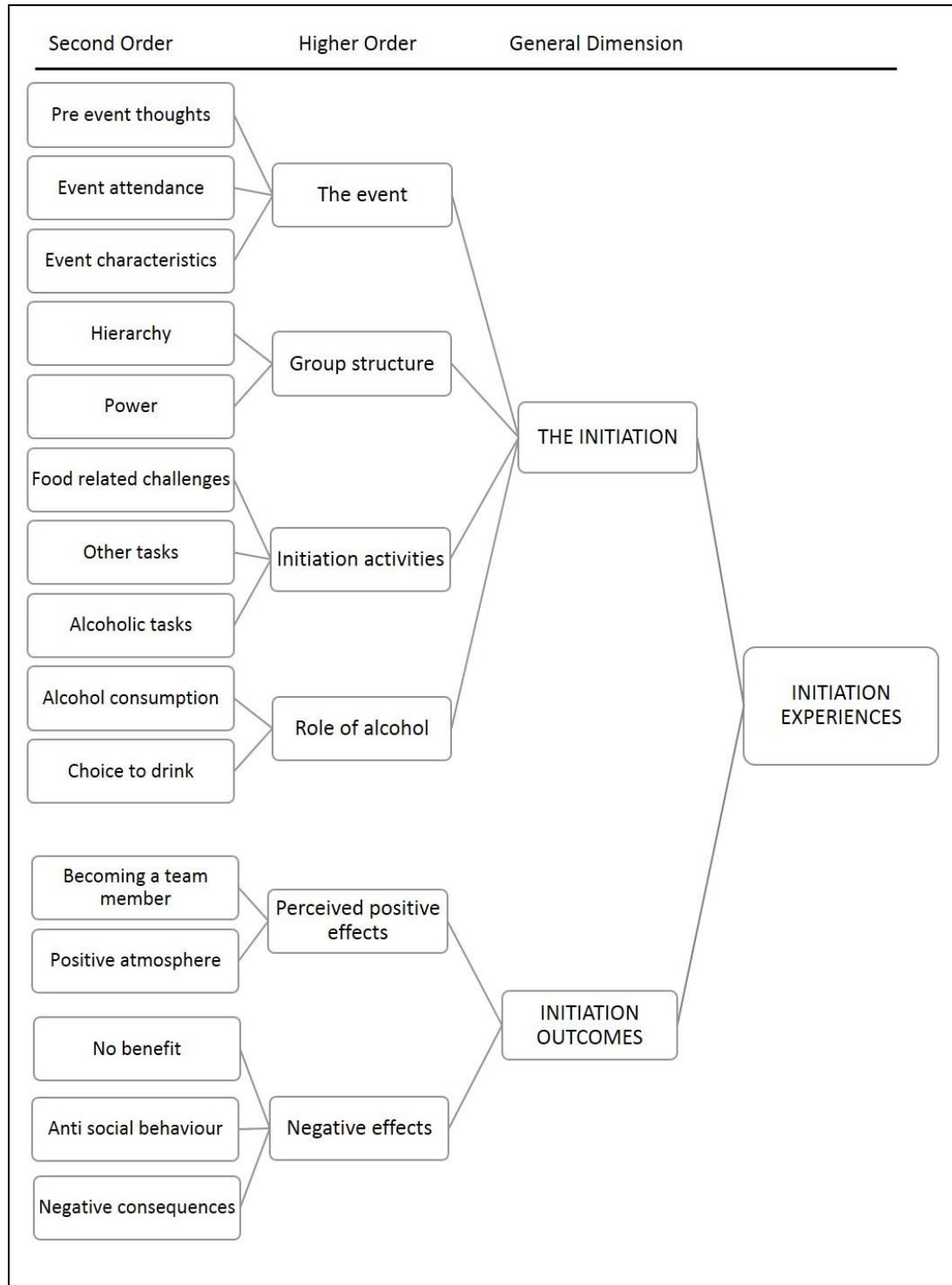


Figure 1 – Themes and dimensions of student athletes' experiences of initiations.